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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 8291

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINS, IS

SUBJECT: HISTADRUT TO HOLD ITS ELECTIONS BEFORE KNESSET ELECTIONS

REF: TEL AVIV 6122

BEGIN SUMMARY: LABOR PARTY CAUCUS IN HISTADRUT EXECUTIVE BUREAU MET DECEMBER 6 TO RECOMMEND THE ADVANCE OF HISTADRUT ELECTIONS TO ALTHOUGH OPPOSED BY ITS SECRETARY GENERAL, WILL GIVE THE GOVERNMENT FIVE MONTHS AFTER THIS "TRIAL RUN" TO ENDEAVOR TO CONVINCE ISRAELI VOTERS THAT INTERNATIONAL AND SECURITY MATTERS MUST CONTINUE TO TAKE PRIORITY OVER DOMESTIC CONSIDERATIONS (HOWEVER GRINDING) AND THAT THE LABOR PARTY REMAINS BEST QUALIFIED TO LEAD THE COUNTRY. END OF SUMMARY

1. THE LOBOR PARTY CAUCUS OF THE 22 MEMBER HISTADRUT EXECUTIVE BUREAU BY A NARROW MAJORITY ADOPTED A RECOMMENDATION DECEMBER 6 TO HOLD THE HISTADRUT ELECTION ON JUNE 14, 1977, WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE KNESSET ELECTION. THE CAUCUS RECOMMENDATION WAS ADOPTED DESPITE SECRETARY GENERAL MESHEL'S OPPOSITION. THE RECOMMENDATION IS NOT BINDING AND THE FINAL ELECTION DATE REMAINS SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY BOTH THE EXECUTIVE BUREAU AND THE LABOR PARTY. HERUT AND OTHER OPPOSITION GROUPS WITHIN HISTADRUT HAVE LONG DEMANDED AN EARLY ELECTION DATE.

2. (IN ADVANCE OF THIS MEETING, THE EXECUTIVE BUREAU
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HAD MET AND APPROVED A CHANGE OF BYLAWS ENABLING ELECTED

HISTADRUT OFFICIALS ASSUMING OFFICE BEFORE THEIR 65TH BIRTHDAY TO SERVE OUT THEIR FULL TERMS, DESPITE THE CURRENT RULE OF MANDATORY RETIREMENT AT 65. THIS CLEARS THE WAY FOR MESHEL TO RUN FOR RE-ELECTION. THE BUREAU ALSO VOTED TO INCREASE THE SALARIES OF ELECTED OFFICIALS, A GESTURE WHICH MAY BE LESS THAN WELCOME BY MESHEL IN THE LIGHT OF HIS FIGHT TO KEEP WAGE DEMANDS TO A MINIMUM. AT THE SAME TIME THE LABOR PARTY HAS REPORTEDLY AGREED TO OFFER MESHEL A SAFE KNESSSET SEAT DURING THE NEXT PARLIMENTARY TERM, AN OFFER WHICH HE HAD TURNED DOWN IN THE PAST BUT WHICH HAD BEEN TRADITIONALLY ACCORDED TO HIS PREDECESSORS.)

3. HISTADRUT SEEMS DESTINED, BECAUSE OF ITS EARLIER ELECTION, TO TAKE THE BRUNT OF PUBLIC DISCONTENT WITH THE RABIN GOVERNMENT OVER THE ECONOMY. THE SHOCK OF THE ANTICIPATED DECLINE OF THE LABOR MAJORITY IN THE HISTADRUT AS A RESULT OF THAT ORGANIZATION'S ELECTIONS MAY HELP MOBILIZE TRADITIONALLY PRO-MAPAI ELEMENTS NOW REMAINING PASSIVE TO RESUME ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE PARTY DURING THE SUBSEQUENT KENSSET ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

4. WITH HISTADRUT ELECTIONS TO FOLLOW SOON AFTER THE LABOR PARTY CONGRESS, THAT PARTY AND THE GOVERNMENT WHICH IT HEADS WILL OF NECESSITY HAVE TO BECOME MORE SENSITIVE TO HISTADRUT STATUS AND CONCERNS AND THIS SHOULD IN TURN STRENGTHEN THE LATTER'S ROLE IN LABOR PARTY AND GOVERNMENT DECISIONS.

5. THE HISTADRUT ELECTIONS ARE EXPECTED TO COINCIDE WITH DIPLOMATIC MANEUVERS TOWARD A RESUMPTION OF THE GENEVA CONFERENCE OR OTHER MIDDLE EAST DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES. THIS WOULD PROBABLY DIVERT PUBLIC ATTENTION FROM DOMESTIC TO INTERNATIONAL AND SECURITY MATTERS AND NOT BE UNWELCOME TO RABIN. MOREOVER, THE FIVE MONTHS PERIOD BETWEEN THE HISTADRUT AND KNESSSET ELECTIONS WOULD APPEAR TO GIVE THE GOVERNMENT TIME TO MEND ITS FENCES AND IMPROVE ITS PUBLIC IMAGE, EVEN IF THERE IS AN ADVERSE OUTCOME (FROM LABOR'S POINT OF VIEW) IN THE HISTADRUT ELECTIONS.

6. THE GOVERNMENTS CURRENT HARD LINE ON SEVERAL ECONOMIC
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AND BUDGET ISSUES UNDER NEGOTIATION WITH THE HISTADRUT (REDUCING FAMILY ALLOWANCE LINKAGE TO THE COST OF LIVING, REDUCING INTEREST RATES FOR HISTADRUT PENSION FUNDS, AND REQUIRING AN INCREASE OF PENSION FUND INVESTMENTS IN GOVERNMENT SECURITIES) PROBABLY REFLECTS TACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS. IN THE END, RABIN IS EXPECTED TO INTERVENE TO ANNOUNCE COMPROMISE WITH HISTADRUT AND THIS SHOULD REINFORCE HIS PRESTIGE AS A LEADER AND

ARBITER IN INTRA-PARTY AND INTRA-ALIGNMENT CONFLICTS.
IN THE MEANTIME, HOWEVER, GOI IS SEEKING LEGISLATION
FOR MEASURES OPPOSED BY HISTADRUT, THUS INTENSIFYING
STATE OF CONFLICT.
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